Preparatory Committee for the 2020 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons

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Establishment of a Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction

Joint working paper submitted by Bahrain, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Libya, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the State of Palestine, the Sudan, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen

Background

1. Since the 1970s, the Arab States have endeavoured to raise their security fears in various international forums. They have expressed their legitimate concern at the existence in the Middle East of nuclear weapons, facilities and programmes that are not subject to a comprehensive safeguards agreement of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

2. The Arab States have put forward a balanced regional solution to the problem of nuclear proliferation in the region: the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East. That initiative is based on a region-wide approach that would guarantee security for all and avoid the selective and biased method of addressing the nuclear issues of each State on a case-by-case basis.

3. In an endeavour to secure the indefinite extension of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, the three depositaries of the Treaty (namely the United States of America, the Russian Federation and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland) submitted the resolution on the Middle East as part of a comprehensive deal.

4. For 15 years after the adoption of the 1995 resolution on the Middle East, the international community and, in particular the three sponsors of the resolution, did not take a single step towards its implementation in practice.

5. The 2010 Review and Extension Conference of the Parties to the Treaty adopted by consensus a plan of action to implement the resolution. The Conference requested that Secretary-General of the United Nations and the three depositary States convene a conference in 2012 on the establishment of a zone free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East, on the understanding that that conference would mark the beginning of a negotiation process towards establishing the zone.

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6. However, because the three States and Israel lacked political will and were not acting in earnest, efforts to convene the conference at the agreed time were once again thwarted, and the conference was postponed to an unspecified date. Moreover, because certain States took an intransigent stance and rejected all of the proposals that had been made regarding the resolution on the Middle East, the 2015 Review Conference did not adopt a final document.

7. As a result, the Arab States' patience has worn thin, and they deplore the repeated delays and deferrals that have occurred despite their positive and open approach to the 2010 plan of action, which has become part of the terms of reference for implementing the resolution on the Middle East.

8. In the two years since the failure of the 2015 Review Conference, the parties responsible for convening the conference have taken no action. The Arab States, however, have undertaken a comprehensive review in order to assess their position and formulate ideas or proposals aimed at fulfilling their commitments. They have done so in the knowledge that the issue is one of the critical factors that will make or break the forthcoming 2020 Review Conference.

9. The fact that the State of Palestine has acceded to the Non-Proliferation Treaty and asked to sign a comprehensive safeguards agreement with IAEA is an additional sign that all of the Arab States are committed to maintaining international safety and keeping the Middle East region free of nuclear weapons and all weapons of mass destruction.

10. The Arab States that are submitting the present working paper wish to emphasize the following points:

(a) The 1995 resolution on the Middle East, which was the basis for the indefinite extension of the Treaty, remains in force until its goals and objectives are met;

(b) Responsibility for implementing the resolution rests with all States parties to the Treaty, particularly nuclear-weapon States and especially the three depositaries of the Treaty that sponsored the resolution on the Middle East;

(c) The goal of ridding the Middle East of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction and bringing all nuclear facilities and programmes under a comprehensive IAEA safeguards agreement is one that cannot be discarded if safety and security are to be achieved in the region.

11. They ask that the following actions be taken:

(a) The purposes and objectives of the Treaty will be achieved only once it becomes universal and States that are not currently parties, especially Israel, accede to it as non-nuclear-weapon States. The delay in achieving that objective remains a stumbling block to the strengthening of the nuclear non-proliferation regime;

(b) While they deplore the failure to implement the international obligations established by the 1995 Review and Extension Conference and the 2010 Review Conference, they support, on an exceptional basis, the idea that the parties responsible for convening the postponed 2012 conference (namely the Secretary-General of the United Nations and the three States that submitted the resolution on the Middle East) should continue to prepare for the immediate convening of a conference on ridding the Middle East of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East on the basis of stated guidelines and principles that would ensure that such efforts are successful;

(c) Rather than stating their commitment to implementation of the resolution in general terms, the conveners of the conference should provide a complete plan and time frame for the stages of implementation of the relevant obligations;

(d) The conference should take place, and the consultative process should begin under the auspices of the United Nations and the three depositaries of the Treaty, before the 2020 Review Conference.

12. Lastly, in order to preserve the credibility of the Treaty, the Arab States that are submitting the present working paper wish to make it clear to all States parties to the Treaty that their proposals are being made in earnest and deserve an equally earnest response on the part of the States responsible for implementing the 1995 resolution on the Middle East and the mechanism adopted in 2010. Detailed progress reports should be submitted to the preparatory committees that are to be convened and to the 2020 Review Conference.